

Canada (British Columbia)

Learners as Enquirers, Glenview Elementary School

The school serves an Aboriginal Reserve community and there are approximately 220 student learners (aged 4 to 13) and 25 adult learners. Most of the teachers are involved both in teaching/facilitating learning at the school and in other schools in the District or Province, and in both the Healthy Schools Network and the Network of Performance Based Schools. University students 'visit en masse' through their assessment course and many continue to be involved afterwards. Common inquiries and projects are shared with two other schools often around Aboriginal understandings, with the learners using blogs and Skype. At the end of each enquiry unit, learning is shared in a common gathering and celebration. Learners tend to work in groups and rarely work by themselves unless they choose to do so. Cross-grade coaching and peer coaching are emphasized. There are two large classrooms for multi-grade classes (across 3-4 grades) and team teaching, and the rest is organized in two-grade classrooms. The learning environment includes the outdoors and the community as well as the local Reserve. The Aboriginal students go to a learning centre on Reserve each day after school to consult with tutors and childcare workers. Community elders and parents are regularly invited into the school and classroom as coaches and tutors.

Main Focus of Innovation: LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANISATION

Other keywords: equity, technology-rich Vignette

General Information

Name of the ILE: Learners as Enquirers, Glenview Elementary School

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ILE submitted by: Debbie Koehn and Denise Wilson, leaders of this case

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Glenview Elementary is a school with a progressive staff that have the mindsets and commitment to create learning opportunities that will provide the skills sets students will need in the future. Staff at Glenview Elementary are committed to the belief that each member of the learning community is both a teacher and a learner. The school's community of learners is recognizant of the need for continuous improved teaching and learning practises.

Staff have made a commitment to learning both for themselves and their students. They work continuously to incorporate formative assessment practices into daily learning practices. Most students work in multi-aged groups, depending on coaching partnerships and teacher facilitation to help set individual goals and develop short and long term inquiries. Self assessment, peer assessment, parental assessment and teacher assessment help students reach personal goals.

The teaching staff has moved into inquiry and project based learning and have a history of developing learning together, working together as teacher coaches and mentors. Staff regularly meet to move themselves forward by examining wise practises, developing an understanding of the changes they are implementing, discussing successes and challenges and sharing their learning journey. Formal meetings are incorporated into school sessions and teachers vigorously discuss implementation of new practise referring to recent academic research, published texts and theory. Teachers are committed to using similar strategies, resources, and tools across grades to help scaffold student learning and provide consistency.

Teachers new to the school are supported. Extra release time is given to new teachers to allow time to observe in established classrooms and teachers familiar to the school assume a mentoring role to support the new staff. Teachers work in learning partners and are accountable to themselves and their partners. The administrator is interested in both collective and individual teacher inquiries and is committed to supporting teachers as they progress in a cycle of inquiry that explores their practice, shared their understandings and evidence both teacher and student learning.

Students are involved in inquiry, developing questions and working to find answers and then share their learning in a variety of ways. Staff support each other and the students across grade levels. Teaching and support staff are familiar with provincially developed curriculum outcomes and have been responsive to provincial calls to participate in responding to draft curriculum and in writing learning outcomes. An emphasis is placed on each student achieving to the best of their ability, developing pride in their capabilities and feeling successful. Differentiated instruction is a way of life. Teachers are aware, through continuous assessment of students' learning needs of next steps to allow for individual and group learning. Teachers at the school are local leaders in both the Healthy Schools Network and the Network of Performance Based Schools. Their leadership, affiliation, and commitment to these two networks has provided them with professional knowledge from international educational perspectives that inform their practise and the support to lead others by sharing this knowledge and implementing it in practical ways in their own context.

The staff at Glenview is becoming increasingly aware of the needs of 21st Century Learners and have examine wise practises already in place and explored new practises that will support the needs of 21st Century Learners. They are aware that learners need to be able to 'think about their own thinking' and develop the deep meta-cognitive skills need to be able to reflect, set and attain personal learning goals. Staff is working to provide the opportunities that allow students to be able to inquiry, using a variety of research tools and then present their knowledge and ideas in a variety of ways. Staff understands the importance of supporting learners as they communicate their knowledge in a variety of ways, settings and subjects areas. And lastly, staff is working to create 21st century learners that need to feel a sense of belonging and place in the broader global community.

Staff are aware and committed to improving and implementing assessment for learning practices that promote student ownership of behaviour and learning and resilience. They are aware and committed to modelling, teaching and providing students with opportunities to develop deep meta-cognitive skills that enable students to reflect and think deeply about concepts and content. And they are aware that oral communication is fundamental and students are encouraged to ask questions, discuss their thinking in AB partner groups or with a student coach or teacher on a daily basis. They have a "no hands up" policy so that all students develop the skills to speak publicly and provide ample 'wait time' to encourage even the most reluctant learner to share. Staff are committed to quality and equity for all learners and have high expectations for behaviour and achievement with consistent routines, structures and strategies. They are in the process of learning about and facilitating student led inquiries.

At the core of student success is a sense of belonging and place and a sense of connectedness to their school, community, heritage, environment and global community. Opportunities are created for students to participate in humanitarian efforts in the global community such as: contributing to a well in Africa, supporting a school with school supplies in Afghanistan, consciously contributing food to a local food bank, providing blankets and warm Haiti.

Staff at Glenview Elementary also place an emphasis on developing an understanding of aboriginal culture for all students. Teachers use authentic literature to develop key understandings about how Aboriginal peoples coexist with each other and the environment and with the support of their Aboriginal Education worker and other connections in the community, they are beginning to involve local Elders to share these understandings with students and staff. The school supports Aboriginal students with a full time Aboriginal Education worker and regular visits to a local Aboriginal reserve to build relationships with members of the Band and Band council, as well as Elders and parents in the community. Teachers are committed to support aboriginal student needs by providing additional adult support, differentiated instruction and learning programs, high expectations for student achievement and opportunities for aboriginal students to share their ideas and learning in ways that respect their heritage and ways of knowing and being.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

The importance of relationship and learning to interact with each other as friends, members of a global community and becoming deep thinking decision makers is the umbrella goal. Learning how to be, accepting responsibility for self and developing an understanding of the responsibilities we hold in the world is the ultimate goal for both students and educators. The staff understands the need for academic knowledge in order to succeed in the world and continually searches research and evidence to find what skills do our students need and what do we need to implement changes in teaching and learning practices to provide for differentiated learning. Teachers focus on student-led learning. Teachers are aware that students must be both enabled and empowered to learn. Students are currently immersed in inquiry based learning and inquiry based projects that rely on background knowledge, developing inquiry and finding more knowledge. We are trying to teach our students how to interact to find information – how to research using technology, text and community resources and how to synthesize that information into new understandings about the world around them and the global world. The province of British Columbia has learning outcomes called IRP's and these are the reference guides for curriculum.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

There are approximately 220 students learners and 25 adult learners in our community. Most of our students travel to our school on school busses, some of them over an hour each way. We are a school that serves an Aboriginal Reserve community. As well, many of our students have family income below the poverty line while some of our students come from an affluent neighbourhood. Students aged 4 to 13 come together daily in the same building.

University students participate in our learning. Through their assessment course they visit en masse, participating in lesson planning, observing the implementation of formative assessment strategies and then discuss what has been observed. Many of the students continue to visit, spending time in the classrooms observing the learning environment. Educators also take on the more formal role of sponsoring teacher candidates in the classroom. Many educators from our school district as well as districts in the province are hosted within the school building. It is not unusual to have 300 visitors a year. Adult learners in the building pride themselves on providing mentorship to both university students and colleagues that visit classrooms, observe strategies and discuss the learning taking place.

Educators from the building work to develop understandings of the learning within the building by travelling inter-provincially and exchanging ideas with others.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

Teachers at Glenview range in years of experience from 4-30 years and ages from mid-twenties to mid-fifties. All are female except for the administrator. Most teachers participate in facilitating learning both in their school and other schools in the District or Province in a variety of ways that include: opening their classroom for observation and discussions, facilitating learning conversations with colleagues at Learning Team Grant Meetings, presenting at Professional Development or Network of Performance Based Schools seminars, participating on committees and coaching or mentoring colleagues or teacher candidates.

Teacher leaders include one staff member who has diligently facilitated and supported learning throughout the school for over five years and built capacity among other teachers to lead and support learning in their classrooms and with colleagues in and out of their school. She, along with another staff member are recent Master of Education and CSML (Certificate of Management and Leadership) graduates as well as regional leaders of the Network of Performance Based Schools. They both have a keen interest in how students and teachers learn and ways that facilitate learning for students and teachers in their own context as well as at systemic levels. Other teachers play an important role in leading learning at different times and capacities. One is involved in leading the Healthy Schools Network for the region and all have been instrumental in participating in planning, implementing, adapting, monitoring, gathering evidence and sharing innovative practices with each other, parent, teacher candidates and colleagues. All teacher facilitators see their roles as distributing leadership and building capacity with their colleagues and administrator in ways that challenge and support learning. At the core of their leadership are five key mindsets that they strive to maintain and model: trust, these key leadership mindsets enable facilitators to persevere in times of disequilibrium and change.

Two of the teachers in this building instruct in the postgraduate program at the University of British Columbia and use inquiry based learning to develop course expectations.

Teachers at this school have been recognized internationally for their progress, receiving the International Reading Association Award in 2007 for the quality of reading instruction in the school.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

We have two very large classrooms that hold multi-graded classes and are team taught by two teachers. In the primary classroom, students participate in some combination of kindergarten/grade one/grade two/grade three and students in the intermediate classroom participate in some form of grade three/four/five students. Both classes enroll around fifty students. The rest of the school is organized in two grade classrooms, except for the two classrooms of Kindergarten students. Kindergarten students attend all day. We are trying to create wall-less classrooms that are centred around the computer centre and the library, the resource centres of the school. Students and teachers can move freely between classes, students often work in classrooms other than their assigned rooms because the learning needs are met in different classroom environments. We are working to create a fluid learning environment. Students are not confined to glass ceilings, they are use performance standards to continuously move learning and achievement forward.

The culture of the school is one of respect – for yourself, for all others, and for the environment. We try to build an awareness of how we interact in our world. Teachers do their best to create an environment focused on collaborative learning. Students rarely work individually, unless they choose to do so. Learning is a social activity at our school. Although the learning is student led teachers have high expectations and provide a controlled environment for learning. Students generate promises that will help

shape the classroom space. They commit to interacting with respect, define active listening and responding to adult and peer suggestions. Each classroom's purpose is to ensure that learners will graduate from the school system and cross the stage with dignity and respect and with a design for purposeful continuation of lifelong learning.

Formative Assessment strategies are embedded in pedagogical practices. Student led teaching helps teachers implement the "right" teaching at the right time. A strong focus is placed on cross grade student coaching, and peer coaching. Students interact with each other purposefully and are deliberately trained to focus on the questions, "What do you know? What do you need to know? How will you get what you need? and What have you learned?" Coaches help peers or younger students examine their learning metacognitively – not just retell information but talk about their thinking, and helping each other move their learning forward. Higher order thinking and skill development is developed between students as they participate in conversations, literacy and numeracy circles and have the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and why they know it. Our school has focused on six formative assessment strategies as stated by Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser:

- provide learners with clarity about and understanding of the learning intentions of the work being done
- provide to and co-develop with learners the criteria for success
- provide regular, thoughtful feedback that moves learning forward for the individual learner
- design and use thoughtful classroom questions to lead discussions that lead to discussion
- put learners to work as learning/teaching resources for each other
- ensure that learners are the owners of their own learning and;

as well the educators at the school are focused on implementing Kaser and Halbert's four big ideas that matter:

- learner self coaching through learning self assessment is the goal of deep learning work
- nimble and responsive teaching
- inquiry mindedness as a way of learning life
- learning for all through networks.

We have focused on developing meta-cognitive skills across the curriculum. The classrooms share a common language of learning, and particular focus has been paid in this school to the acquisition by all partners, parents, students and teachers to acquire a common language so that challenges and successes can be discussed in a way that is understood by all. We are proud that our students can tell us what they have learned, but it excites us even more when the students can find the language to explain what is blocking the learning.

We are currently exploring what inquiry learning and projects look like in our school. By focusing on students' learning needs we have developed ways to move our students forward. We observe and assess continually, grouping and regrouping students as a learning need presents itself. Students and teachers use performance standards to move learning forward.

We are looking for ways in which the students are developing their own learning portfolio, a way for them to examine who they are as learners, not a judgment statement of who someone else (teacher) thinks they

are. To this end, many of our students self-assess and inform the adults of progress, rather than the adults informing the students. Our students are extremely responsible and accurate in their self assessments and deliver clear reports to the adults about the learning that has taken place. The provincially required paperwork exists as legally required but all stakeholders place higher value as student self assessment. Many students do not even read teacher written reports.

By focusing on the above we have been able to create a culture of both adult and student learners.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

Our school is one that has a large Aboriginal population. We work closely with the Band's learning centre providing both human and physical resources. Our Aboriginal students go to the learning centre on the Shelley Reserve each day after school, where they are met by tutors and childcare workers who help meet academic and social and emotional needs. We try support our students by "dropping by" to visit and interact with them on their territory, as their guests. As well, we invite the Elders into our school to help us develop learning experiences about traditional ways of living. Last year, our school was fortunate to spend time learning about traditional healing plants and how to identify them. This year we will travel by bus to the Reserve in the Spring and gather and dry our own plants, as well as learn how to identify the animals' trails that had used the forested area around the Reserve. As well, an environmentalist will be joining us to discuss the ways in which the mill is affecting the animal and plant growth in this area.

Aboriginal students are involved in a literacy program where they Skype their responses to others in a different school building, although one that is still in the school district. The emphasis of this program is that there are a number of different ways to demonstrate your response to learning – students have created spirit stones, button blankets, friendship bracelets and paintings using traditional shapes and colours. Students have learned clan dances and eaten traditional foods. They use Skype to share their projects and learning.

As well, our Aboriginal students are focused on paying good deeds forward. They sporadically compliment teachers and other students in the school. Cards are sent and kind deeds are done anonymously to honour and show gratitude to others.

Glenview Elementary has a diverse population. Many of our students live below the poverty line and some of them come from relative affluence. We encourage parents to spend time in our classrooms as coaches and tutors. Parents feel welcomed in the school and respond positively to attitude surveys. Many parents use internet connections to communicate while others often just "drop in" to touch bases. We have a parent support council to help develop our School Plan for Student Success and a separate group of parents who meet monthly to develop special events for students. The school hosts several learning events throughout the year in which they share the learning practices embedded in the school. For many of our parents formative assessment practices are new. We provide evenings such as "lasagne and literacy" when parents and students are invited to share a meal, then students share how learning intentions, criteria, etc. are used in the classroom. Students and parents participate in a developed lesson so that parents can experience the changed learning process.

We rely on the generosity of the University of Northern British Columbia's professors. As we have moved into inquiry based learning, many of our questions have not been answered through technology or text research, but by the visits of these professors and the sharing of their knowledge. Last year an insect specialist joined us for the day as we explored questions about butterflies. Dr. Geoffrey Payne, from UNBC has brought the students into the medical building to answer questions about the human body, as well as visiting the classroom. An environmentalist activist has also visited our school.

Our school has an interest in the environment and we bring in members of the community to support our learning. We work closely with REAPS, a local environmental awareness group and they offer a series of workshops to our students about lessening our footprints on our planet. Under their guidance, we have planted vegetable gardens for low income seniors in our neighbourhood to increase their ability to be self-sustaining, increase our capacity to serve others and to learn how to manage a garden. This year we have applied for and will be receiving a number of recycled moveable garbage cans that we will be turning into planters. We plan on planting a salad garden for student consumption.

We are in the middle of the forest and are a forestry industry based town. We try to take our students into the forest for environmental learning – we examine ways in which new life grows and how old life is returned to the earth – the life cycle of the forest and understanding our role in nature is important to us.

This is a school that has just amalgamated and received students from a number of schools – we almost doubled in size this current school year and it is anticipated we will receive even more students in the coming year. The school is full and we are anticipating a portable classroom next year. An emphasis is placed on human resources; we strive to provide adult support for our students. It is extremely important to us that our students are supported in their learning by adults who are available and can help our students search for the resources that are needed to support their learning. We are focusing on extending our learning community beyond the walls of the school and search for ways to get our students into the community or bring resources in the community into our school building.

We are a member of a family of schools learning community. Our students interact with students at two other elementary schools through the use of Blogs and Skype. Teachers from all three schools meet to plan common inquiries, generally based on increasing knowledge around Aboriginal understandings. Students from all three schools gather together at school, have a celebratory introduction to their common learning and establish themselves as a member of this learning community. Each school pursues similar inquiries, usually based on understanding how we interact with our culture in our environment. Students participate in a number of developed projects and inquiries, and share common knowledge through technology devices. The learning environment moves into the outdoors and the community, as well as the local Reserve. At the end of each inquiry unit learning is shared in a common gathering or celebration. As well we are exploring joining an international community of learning and sharing our experiences.

Currently, there are three portable labs available with 1 computer for every 3 students. Labs are strategically placed around the building and move from class to class as required. As well there is a computer classroom lab bank. Students use the Skype program to communicate with students in other school buildings, discussing literature and exploring their thinking. When sharing learning students are given free choice of presentation, they are encourage to use technology or digital resources – PowerPoint presentations, inserted videotaped clips, texts, etc. Some teachers use technology to communicate via web sites with parents. All parents and students are encouraged to interact with the teachers electronically. We are working to create a wall-less learning environment.

Students are using blogs to communicate learning between themselves and others in our family of schools. These schools are in our regional zone and are within a ten kilometer radius of our school. Teachers are effectively using Smartboards and document readers as learning strategies in the classroom.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

Seven years ago the school was considered to be one of the lowest functioning schools in the district. The administrator worked to bring a teacher leader to the school with the purpose of building academic achievement and a sense of school community. It started with an emphasis on increasing moral purpose and empathy among the teaching staff and the students. Academic achievement was minimal; students were not encouraged and did not feel themselves to be part of the learning community. Over the seven years we have incorporated a social learning community that includes a constructivist approach.

Expectations that each class develops promises that encompass the purposes of self managed behaviour and the expectations of how relationships will be developed. School wide expectations are of the highest moral standards but students are given many choices in terms of consequences focused on restitution and the flexibility of choice that would be expected of ownership of behaviour idealism. Students and teaching staff feel successful and implement values and standards that support each learner to continuously build capacity as a critical thinker. The highest academic and behaviour standards are sought. Teaching staff familiarized themselves and the students with the use of BC Performance standards and the provincially developed curriculum. Learning is explicit and assessed continuously and assessment is consistent throughout the grades. Educators periodically meet and assess as a unit, ensuring that expectations are similar. All learners at the school have established a learning routine of asking, what do we know? What do we need to learn? How are we going to get where we need to be? And what have we learned? This continuous cycle of learning has moved us ahead. Educators in the building are aware of when intervention is necessary and work as a team to best meet the needs of the learner. We wanted to build a complex, contemporary community of connected learners.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

The school is funded by the Education Ministry of British Columbia with no additional funding connected to the ILE except for the small grants provide through the Ministry of Education to members of the Network of Performance Based Schools.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

Student learning is assessed by the use of performance standards. Learners set goals, describe the actions that they will take to reach their goals and work to achieve the goals. The cycle is continuous and focus is not on what has been learned, but what is yet to be learned. The school's academic learning is assessed provincially by the Foundation Skills Assessment tool. This is our first year as a grade seven school and since we have only three grade seven students, it is unlikely that we will be ranked.

Teachers are vigilant in their assessment, and both summative and formative assessment strategies are used.

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

This school's journey has been well documented. Two video clips have been produced and are available on the Network of Performance Based Schools website: www.npbs.ca. As well, articles have been written by teachers from the school, Together is Better is available on the British Columbia Teacher's website at <http://bctf.ca/publications/TeacherInquirer.aspx?id=16706>.

A paper presented at ICSEI 2011 entitled Spirals of Inquiry: Building Professional Inquiry to Foster Student Learning was written by Dr. Judy Halbert, Dr. Linda Kaser and Deborah Koehn.